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SUBJECT: EASTERN FRONT OFFER UP THEIR SIDE

REF: ASMARA 543

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On June 22, Ambassador John Yates met with the leadership of the Eastern Front to get a better sense of their negotiating strategy and readiness following the first round of talks. The group explained that their primary goal before talks begin is to build a broadly based consensus among the various groups in eastern Sudan. They also presented their understanding of how negotiations would proceed and gave prominence to their hopes for equitable wealth sharing to help meet the needs of the people of the East. The group admitted that they still needed help preparing for the next round of negotiations and has asked various international partners, including the USG, to provide them the necessary training and technical expertise. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On June 22, Ambassador John Yates (representing AF/SPG) and ConOff met with the majority of Eastern Front leadership, including Musa Muhamed Ahmed, Dr. Amna Dirar, Abdallah Kuna, Ali Safi and two Rashaida representatives sitting in for Mabruuk Salim. The discussion followed the conclusion of the preparatory talks and signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) between the Eastern Front and GNU (see reftel). The discussion initially focused on issues surrounding the signing of the DOP and the fact that the Eastern Front was unsure until the end, whether an agreement would be reached. They expressed dissatisfaction with the way the issue of observers had been dealt with, but acknowledged that they did not want the issue to hold up the entire process, and stated that they would work to get observers involved in some capacity. They also explained that they were under the impression from both the GSE and GNU that the international community could be involved in advisor and technical expert roles.

¶3. (C) The Eastern Front leaders made it very clear that their main objective during the break between the first and second rounds of talks is to build consensus for negotiations amongst the peoples of eastern Sudan and ensure the greatest degree of

representation within the Eastern Front. They plan to hold consultative meeting with Eastern Front representatives from throughout the region and amongst the different ethnic groups before they enter into the second round of talks set to commence on July 17. The talks, they explained, will probably be held somewhere near the border of both countries to make it easier for the greatest number of people to attend. They assume approximately 100 members could attend, similar to meetings held in February/March of this year. They did not provide specifics, but claim some European nations as well as the GSE have promised to support them in organizing the consultative meetings.

14. (C) On the format for the next round of negotiations, the Eastern Front explained that due to their lack of capacity to engage in more than one area or issue at a time, they have requested that each area - Power Sharing, Wealth Sharing and Security Arrangements - be dealt with separately and finalized --and in the listed order -- before moving on to the next issue. The Eastern Front leaders stated that while the GSE initially proposed a 15 person delegation, the Eastern Front requested up to 20 people and that at this time they plan to have 4 Beja delegates, 4 Rashaida delegates and 10 delegates from other ethnic groups in eastern Sudan.

15. (C) Much of their focus appears to be on ensuring that the eastern Sudan region gets their fair share of resources and wealth to provide proper primary health care and educational opportunities. On power sharing, they seem almost completely focused on building the Eastern Front movement into an active and capable political party. They acknowledged that many of the agreements struck on power sharing may only be applicable until national elections are held. They also reiterated prior appeals to the USG to help them begin strategizing and transitioning into a political party.

16. (SBU) The Eastern Front has asked for assistance in hosting their consultative meeting and is also seeking training before the second round of talks. In addition, they hope for assistance from technical experts and advisors during the negotiations. Thus far, it seems that the Norwegians, Dutch and Swedes are willing to provide some level of support. It is unclear if there will be additional needs for assistance. They also asked the USG to assist them in implementation of a future agreement between them and the GNU and possibly training and capacity building for the Eastern Front movement's transition into a political party.

17. (C) COMMENT: The Eastern Front has come a long way from initial meetings with them almost a year ago. While there are still some small kinks to work out before the second round of negotiations, they appear more focused, confident and united than ever before. The consultative meeting will hopefully bring some new ideas, energy and expertise to the next round of talks. Post advise whether there are possibilities for assisting the Eastern Front, especially in the area of political party capacity building, in the near term. End Comment.

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